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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. von WAGNER (Germany)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 156: RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORK AND REFORM OF THE AGENDA OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 156: RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORK AND REFORM OF THE AGENDA OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE (A/48/194)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the informal paper on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee circulated during the first open-ended meeting of the Group of Friends of the Chairman by the twelve States members of the European Community.

2. Mr. GUILLAUME (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Community, said that the Twelve had requested the inclusion of agenda item 156 and had submitted an informal paper on the matter. He took note of the other informal papers submitted, which were considered to be constructive and interesting contributions, and pointed out that two clearly different paths had opened: rationalization of the work of the First Committee and the revitalization of the Committee. In the view of the Twelve, while both aspects were compatible, they must not be confused.

3. For the purpose of advancing the Committee's work, the European Community intended to submit, no later than Thursday, 3 November, a draft resolution that would include all the elements of the informal paper, to be coordinated by the Netherlands in its capacity as a Friend of the Chairman. The draft would be open to all suggestions related to the issue of rationalization.

4. Mrs. MASON (Canada) said she hoped that, at its next meeting, the Group of Friends of the Chairman could specifically address the Chairman's proposal to improve the integration of the work of the First Committee within the broader context of security through a deeper understanding of the concepts of preventive diplomacy, confidence-building, post-conflict peace-building and peace-keeping. Canada supported the views expressed by the Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations in his statement during Disarmament Week, in which he emphasized the wealth of experience of the First Committee and other multilateral disarmament bodies and noted that the methodology of verification and control developed in that context could be applied to activities for prevention of conflicts and peace-keeping, and that confidence-building measures could be a useful tool in preventive diplomacy and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

5. Mr. RYDBERG (Sweden) said that his delegation had studied with interest the informal papers submitted by the Chairman, the European Community and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. The Committee should discuss the best way in which to coordinate the activities of the various United Nations organs in the sphere of arms control, disarmament and international security, and take the earliest possible decision on practical questions affecting the Committee only, such as the proposal to cluster agenda items put forward in the informal paper of the European Community.

(Mr. Rydberg, Sweden)

6. His delegation supported the clustering of agenda items as proposed by the European Community, which appeared to be logical, clear and politically unbiased. It would, however, like to offer two specific suggestions: first, crucial matters of compliance and verification were closely linked to transparency and confidence-building and could be dealt with either together with those topics or as a separate item. Second, the agenda item on Antarctica was very different from other regional disarmament and security issues and, to the extent that the item was allocated to the First Committee, it should be dealt with separately.

7. Mr. DEMBINSKI (Poland) said that, at the meetings of the Group of Friends of the Chairman, the question of the format of discussions conducive to a true dialogue had been raised. In his view, a prolonged general debate left no possibility for a real exchange of views, which could be achieved if the thematic approach proposed by the European Community was adopted. Furthermore, discussing each thematic cluster of items separately would encourage delegations to make statements on each of them, which undoubtedly would enrich the discussion and would improve the quality and effectiveness of the Committee's work.

8. Clustering of items would also facilitate the adoption of resolutions that, as mentioned, were the normal outcome of the debate and reflected the major concerns of Member States. Therefore, it would be difficult and possibly counter-productive to attempt to limit the number of resolutions, although it should be acknowledged that not all resolutions were equally relevant and some were adopted each year as a matter of routine. The sponsors of such yearly resolutions should ensure that they were necessary and relevant before submitting the drafts.

9. Another important question was the relationship between the First Committee and other organs dealing with disarmament, especially the Conference on Disarmament. The Committee's task was to open new fields and formulate ideas which could serve as the basis for further work by a negotiating body, especially the Conference on Disarmament, leading to the adoption of legally binding instruments.

10. Finally, he said that the rationalization of the Committee's work was an ongoing process and spectacular results could not be expected; therefore, the item should be placed on the agenda every year.

11. Mr. MARIN BOSCH (Mexico) said that it would be more appropriate to consider the item on rationalization of the work of the First Committee in informal meetings within the framework of the Group of Friends of the Chairman. He supported the statement by the representative of Poland, and believed that it was essential for the debate to be organized in a manner that would produce a true exchange of views in order to adapt the work of the Committee to the situation in the real world.

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

12. His delegation welcomed the informal paper on the rationalization of work submitted by the European Community. It was surprised, however, that the informal paper had been converted into a formal draft resolution within such a short time. An endeavour must be made to prevent diversion or impairment of the work of the Committee, which was devoted to disarmament and security, through a shift in its focus towards aspects relating to peace-keeping.

13. The CHAIRMAN said that the two formal meetings had been scheduled in accordance with the request for inclusion of the new item on the Committee's agenda, but that informal meetings would be held at a later date.

14. Mr. CHANDRA (India) supported the views expressed by the representative of Sweden. In the rationalization of its work, the Committee must act with great care, since the level of priority assigned to the various items must not be changed. As for the paper submitted by the European Community, he believed that it should be considered in conjunction with that submitted by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Paragraph 1 of the European Community paper lacked clarity; he did not understand exactly what was meant by integrating issues of disarmament and international security and if it was really necessary, since both were considered by the Committee. The clustering of items, the rationalization and streamlining of the agenda and the adoption of a thematic approach did not present major problems, but it would be appropriate to provide some clarifications on important issues that were not included in the "head items", such as general and complete disarmament, science and technology, non-use and security assurances. The place given to each item on the current agenda should be indicated. Clarification was needed with respect to issues of international security and disarmament, which were mentioned in several places. There was also some repetition in paragraphs 5, 6, 7 and 8.

15. Mr. KING (United States of America) agreed that it was necessary to focus the rationalization on the aspects concerning the Committee and its working methods, as well as on disarmament questions, an area where much remained to be done. Before adopting a final decision, the financial implications of the suggestions contained in the two draft resolutions concerning proposed resources for example, of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs, should be examined minutely. It was important to know exactly where those resources would be found. Lastly, he wished to know if the sponsors of the draft resolutions intended to merge them, since a first step in rationalizing the Committee's work would be to attempt to merge the resolutions on that item.

16. Mr. PERRI (Brazil) supported the views expressed by the previous speakers. The Committee faced a decision that could shape its work in the coming years. He was surprised that the European Community had submitted its paper as a formal draft resolution. He was ready to discuss most of the suggestions made therein with a positive attitude, but feared that the Committee would encounter difficulties if it attempted to speed the process and pushed through a formal decision at that stage of the debate.

17. Mr. STEPHANOU (Greece), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he wished to make it clear that the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had used the incorrect name for that country in its statement at the previous meeting. To that effect, he cited Security Council resolution 817 (1993) and recalled that the controversy mentioned therein had not yet been resolved.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.